

SEE NOW THEN (2013)

Jamaica Kincaid

It is true that my mother loved me very much, so much that I thought love was the only emotion and even the only thing that existed; I only knew love then and I was an infant up to the age of seven and could not know that love itself, though true and a stable standard, is more varied and unstable than any element or substance that rises up from the earth's core; my mother loved me and I did not know that I should love her in return; it never occurred to me that she would grow angry at me for not returning the love she gave to me; I accepted the love she gave me without a thought to her and took it for my own right to live in just the way that would please me; and then my mother became angry at me because I did not love her in return and then she became even more angry that I did not love her at all because I would not become her, I had an idea that I should become myself; it made her angry that I should have a self, a separate being that could never be known to her; she taught me to read and she was very pleased at how naturally I took to it, for she thought of reading as a climate and not everyone adapts to it; she did not know that before she taught me to read I knew how to write, she did not know that she herself was writing and that once I knew how to read I would then write about her; she wished me dead but not into eternity, she wished me dead at the end of day and that in the morning she would give birth to me again; in a small room of the public library of St. John's, Antigua, she showed me books about the making of the earth, the workings of the human digestive system, the causes of some known diseases, the lives of some European composers of classical music, the meaning of pasteurisation; I cannot remember that I was taught the alphabet, the letters A, B and C one after the other in sequence with all the others ending in the letter Z, I can only see now that those letters formed into words and that the words themselves leapt up to meet my eyes and that my eyes then fed them to my lips and so between the darkness of my impenetrable eyes and my lips that are the shape of chaos before the tyranny of order is imposed on them is where I find myself, my true self and from that I write; but I knew

how how to write before I could read, for all that I would write about had existed before my knowing how to read and transport it into words and put it down on paper, and all of the world had existed before I even knew how to speak of it, had existed before I even knew how to understand it, and in looking at it even more closely, I don't really know how to write because there is so much before me that I cannot yet read; I cannot write why I did not love my mother then when she loved me so completely; what I felt for her has no name that I can now find; I thought her love for me and her own self was one thing and that one thing was my own, completely my own, so much so that I was part of what was my own and I and my own were inseparable and so to love my mother was not known to me and so her anger directed toward me was incomprehensible to us both; my mother taught me to read, she and I at first could read together and then she and I could read separately but not be in conflict, but then, to see it now, only I would write; after she taught me to read, I caused such disruption in my mother's everyday life: I asked her for more books and she had none to give me and so she sent me to a school that I would only be allowed in and admitted to if I was five years old; I was already taller than was expected for someone my age, three and a half years old, and my mother said to me, now remember when they ask you how old say you are five, over and over again, she made me repeat that I was five and when the teacher asked me how old I was I said that I was five years of age and she believed me; it is perhaps then that I became familiar with the idea that knowing how to read could alter my circumstances, that then I came to know that the truth could be unstable while a lie is hard and dark, for it was not a lie to say that I was five when I was three and a half years old, for three and a half years old then was now, and my five-year-old self then would soon be in my now; that teacher's name was Mrs. Tanner and she was a very large woman, so large that she could not turn around quickly and we would take turns pinching her bottom, and by the time she looked to see which of us had done so we would assume a pose of innocence and she never knew which one of us had been so rude and mischievous; and it was while in Mrs. Tanner's presence that I came to develop fully my two selves, then and now, united only through seeing, and it happened in this way: Mrs. Tanner was teaching us to read from book with simple words and pictures, but since I already knew how to

read I could see things within the book that I was not meant to see; the story in the book was about a man who was a farmer and his name was Mr. Joe and he had a dog named Mr. Dan and a cat named Miss Tibbs and a cow who did not have a name, the cow was only called the cow, and he had a hen and her name was Mother Hen and she had twelve chicks, eleven of them were ordinary, golden chicks, but the twelfth one was bigger than the others and had black feathers and he had a name, it was Percy; Percy caused his mother a great deal of worry, for he always would provoke the anger of Miss Tibbs and Mr. Dan by attempting to eat their food; but his mother's greatest worry came when she saw him try to fly up to sit on the uppermost bar of the farm's fence; he tried and tried and failed and then one day succeeded but only for a moment and then he fell down and broke one of his wings and one of his legs; it was Mr. Joe who said, 'Percy the chick had a fall.' I liked that sentence then and I like that sentence now but then I had no way of making any sense of it, I could only keep it in my mind's eye, where it rested and grew in the embryo that would become my imagination; a good three and a half years later, I met Percy again but in another form; as a punishment for misbehaving in class, I was made to copy Books One and Two of Paradise Lost by John Milton and I fell in love with Lucifer, especially as he was portrayed in the illustration, standing victoriously on one foot on a charred globe, the other foot aloft, his arms flung out in that way of the victor, brandishing a sword in one of them, his head of hair thick and alive for his hair was all snakes poised to strike; I then remembered Percy and I do now know Percy.

SPLICE

SPINES OF BOOK AND READER, ASKEWN BY 45 DEGREES. READING TOGETHER IN GROUPS. BODY AT HALF ELEVATION.

AUTOGRAFT

CLAD TEXT WITH ITS DOUBLE AT THE DISTANCE OF A LINE. THAT IS, WHILE READING, SPEAK TWICE EACH LINE. IN GROUPS, ONE READER EACH HER PARAGRAPH.

BRIDGE GRAFT

SCAM THE TEXT WITHOUT MEANING; ON SOME SIGNAL, A SINGLE WORD IS SPOKEN (EACH LIKELY DIFFERENT).
THUS, VERTICAL THE TEXT.

STUB

HYPERBOLIC FORM, GIDDY, EXPRESSES ITSELF AGAINST THE INNER SKINS. THAT IS, WHILE READING ALOUD, PLACE EARPLUGS INTO THE EARS. READING OUT LOUD & TOGETHER. PERFORM IN JOY. I

SPLIT THICKNESS

WHILE PARTNERED, THE MUTUAL, COMFORTABLE TOUCHING OF SKINS IS HAD (E.G. HOLDING HANDS, TOUCHING WRISTS, A DESIRELESS FINGER IN THE NAVEL). THUS, PRACTICE ALTERNATING BETWEEN WANTING NOTHING AND DESIRING EVERYTHING FROM TOUCH AND TEXT ALIKE.

SADDLE

TWO ROLES: READER AND LISTENER, IN PERPENDICULAR RELATION. L FINDS A SEATED POSITION WITH THE R'S HEAD LAYING IN LAP.

L PLACES HANDS ON THE VOCAL CHORDS OF THE R. HEAD STILL IN LAP, R READS ALOUD THE TEXT. REPEAT AND REPEAT. ALTERNATING ROLES IS ASKED, BUT NOT INSISTED.

CROWN

SUPPLECLUMP BODIES IN THREES. ARCHITECTING THE LEGS AT TRIANGLES. DOWNCAST DIAPHRAGM, SPEAKLOW, EYES TO EYES WHILE LISTENING.

IMPLANT

SILENT CHOOSING OF A LETTER WHOSE NOW BOLDING PRESENCE AT THE HEAD OF A WORD SPELLS THAT WORD AS "YELLOW". ALTERNATE THIS CIPHER BY READER. THUS, VERTIGOING AT MONOCHROME.

BUD GRAFT

ELBOW AND FLOOR. SPEAK ONLY WORDS POISING AT THE COLUMN'S LEFTLY PERIMETER. RETIRE OTHERWISE INTO THE SKIM OF SILENT READING. OSCILITATING AND UNTOGETHERLY.

TONGUE AND WHIP

TEXT WITHDRAWS (COYLY). READING OUT LOUD AND TOGETHER. WITH CONTESTING DILATION & QUIVERPUPILS.

CLEFT GRAFT

SITTING BACK AGAINST BACK (NOT NECESSARILY SOLITUDE) AND READING IN ONE'S HEAD; IN THE STRANGE THICK OF READING BY ONE'S SELF. PLEASE, PLEASE, LEAVE AS YOU PLEASE.